

Legacies of the Sikh Past For the Twentieth Century

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Legacies of the Sikh Past for the Twentieth Century

J.S. Grewal

The "twentieth century" for our present purpose does not start with the year 1901 but about half a century earlier with the British colonial rule in the Punjab, and by "legacies" we mean simply the inheritance left by the pre-colonial generations of Sikhs to the succeeding generations. Much has been written on the precolonial history of the Sikhs but not specifically with reference to the major legacies of this period.¹

The closest we come to a consideration of this question is in W.H. McLeod's essays published in 1975 as *The Evolution of the Sikh Community*,² in which he has discussed the Sikh scriptures, the cohesive ideals and institutions of the Sikh Panth and the problem of caste in the Sikh social order, besides an essay each on the *janam-sakhis* and "the evolution of the Sikh community." In fact, it is possible to adapt these essays for our present purpose with only a mild disagreement here and a minor modification there. However, McLeod has not posed the problem directly, and we can outline the significant developments of the pre-colonial period of Sikh history in slightly different terms. The major themes for discussion can be the Holy Granth, the doctrine of *Guru-Panth*, *raj karega khalsa*, social differentiation and ideological differentiation within the Sikh Panth.

The legacies of the Sikh past were related to the historical situations in which they evolved after the enunciation of a new religious ideology by Guru Nanak as the basis of a new social order. The peaceful evolution of the Sikh Panth into a distinctive socio-religious order under his first four successors during the sixteenth century took place in a politico-administrative framework marked by relative peace and prosperity. The response of Guru Nanak's successors and their followers to interference by an intolerant administration

1. For bibliography on the pre-twentieth-century legacies of the Sikhs we refer readers to the appropriate sections of the "Selected Bibliography" at the end of this volume. ...Editors' note.

2. W.H. McLeod, *The Evolution of the Sikh Community* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1975; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976).

during the seventeenth century transformed the Sikh Panth into a potential instrument of socio-political change. The synchronisation of the emergence of the Khalsa with the decline of the Mughal empire in the early eighteenth century enabled them to carve out a large number of principalities, which were unified under one monarch in the early nineteenth century to become the most powerful state known to the Punjab in its entire history, with serious socio-economic and cultural consequences for the Sikh community.

The historical situation for the Sikh community changed radically with the annexation of the Punjab to a modern colonial empire. In this new context, the Punjab, like the rest of the country, witnessed socio-economic change on an unprecedented scale, affecting all aspects of the life of the people. The Sikhs responded to this change in diverse ways, in closer contact with the rest of their countrymen.

In the democratic Republic of India, with its ideal of socialism, the pace of change has become more rapid and the scope of change more comprehensive. The members of the Sikh community have witnessed and contributed to a great many changes, trying to find a place and to pursue wealth and power in the changing world of the twentieth century. To what extent and in what ways the legacies of the past have been relevant for the Sikhs in the twentieth century are surely important questions. They will find at least partial answers in this volume.

I

For an appreciation of the importance of the Holy Granth, we have to start with Guru Nanak's conception of the word *shabad*. God has neither form, colour, nor material sign, but is "revealed through the true Word." Without the Word one is condemned to the cycle of death and rebirth. The term *shabad* often occurs as *Guru ka shabad* or simply *Guru-shabad*. In fact the *shabad* is sometimes equated with Guru. "The Word is the Guru." At the same time "the Guru is God"; "the true Guru is *Niranjana* [unblemished]"; "the eternal and incarnate one is the Guru." Furthermore, Guru Nanak refers to himself as God's minstrel (*dhadi*) to proclaim "the glory of the Word."

From this to the equation of the Word with the utterances of Guru Nanak was only a short step. His first successor, Guru Angad, uses the term *Guru* as much for Guru Nanak as for God, and *Guru ka shabad* becomes the *amrit-bani* of Guru Nanak. It is understandable, therefore, that Guru Angad evolved the Gurmukhi script for recording the *bani* of Guru Nanak. His successor, Guru Amardas, refers to the *bani* of his predecessors as the only true *bani*, and at a few places, he refers to *bani* as God (*Nirankar*, *Brahman*). Guru Amardas had by his side not only a musician who used to sing the *bani*, but also a scribe who used to write it down. Two volumes (*pothis*) prepared by Guru Amardas served as the basis for an enlarged recension by Guru Arjan in the first decade of the seventeenth century, a recension generally known as the *Adi Granth*, to distinguish it from the *Dasam Granth*, a later compilation containing

compositions of the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh. For Guru Arjan the Granth was "the abode of God."

The contents of the *Adi Granth* were systematically arranged according to a complex but generally consistent pattern of division and sub-division, so that structural consistency becomes a distinct feature of the *Adi Granth*. Another of its remarkable features is the inclusion of the compositions of several persons other than the Gurus, like Kabir, Farid, Namdev, Ravidas, Jaidev, Surdas and Ramanand. Many of them belonged to the low castes. The inclusion of their *bani* may be seen as an attempt to assimilate a growing popular tradition. They belonged to different places in the Indian subcontinent and their inclusion also suggests a pan-Indian stance on the part of Guru Arjan, who in any case was conscious of the increasing number of Sikhs in many cities of the Mughal empire outside the Punjab. There is a strong affinity between the ideas and attitudes of the Gurus and those of the *sants* and the *bhaktas* included in the *Adi Granth*. The fact that decisions regarding content were taken by the Gurus makes all the contents equally sacred.

Before his death in 1708, Guru Gobind Singh declared "the eternal Word" to be the true Guru of the Khalsa. Since the *shabad-bani* was contained in the Granth compiled by Guru Arjan, guruship was deemed to be vested in the Granth. During the early eighteenth century, however, the *Dasam Granth* also was compiled, and in the eyes of some of the Sikhs, guruship was vested in both the Granths. Around 1770, we find Kesar Singh Chhibber still maintaining that the two Granths were like "real brothers" and that the *Adi Granth*, being the older, was entitled to greater respect and veneration. Nevertheless, Chhibber clearly equates the *Adi Granth* with the Guru. By the mid-nineteenth century the doctrine of *Guru-Granth* was well established. The unity and continuity of guruship was built into this doctrine. Indeed, it was generally believed that the divine spirit which had inhabited the bodies of the ten Gurus dwelt now in the Granth.

The doctrine of *Guru-Granth* has been reinforced in the twentieth century, and without any ambiguity: the Granth prepared by Guru Arjan is clearly the "Adi Sri Guru Granth Sahib." The printed version is of one of the early recensions containing the *bani* of the ninth Guru, Tegh Bahadur; its compilation is attributed to Guru Gobind Singh. As W.H. McLeod remarks, the centrality of the Holy Granth in Sikh custom and the manifold uses to which it is put "leave no room for doubt concerning its enormous importance to the Panth." According to McLeod, the message of the *Adi Granth* is simply this: "Salvation is obtained by means of regular, persistent, disciplined meditation on the manifold expressions of the divine presence in the physical world and in human experience." This does take care of the major thrust of the message.

It may be added, however, that social and even political concerns are not outside the scope of the *Adi Granth*. Social inequality based on the caste system, for example, is denounced in explicit terms. Political injustice in the form of oppression by the rulers and discrimination based on differences of faith

are similarly denounced in clear terms. Furthermore, even in the *bani* of Guru Nanak, we come upon the familiar Indian idea that God protects his devotees and destroys the wicked. In the *bani* of Guru Amardas, this idea comes to have a bearing on the situation of his followers, who are reassured that he whose Master is all-powerful can not come to any harm at the hands of a mortal. Guru Ramdas refers to his faction (*dhara*) as God's faction. God protects his own devotees and degrades their detractors and enemies. The emperors and kings, the *rajas*, the *khans*, the *umara* and the *shiqdars* are under his command. The Sikhs of the Guru do not have to fear the earthly *diwans* because their *Diwan* is God himself.

II

The term *Guru-Panth* was, and can still be, used in two senses: one, the Panth of the Guru, which is only a way of referring to the distinctive Sikh Panth; the other, the Panth as the Guru, which refers to the doctrine of *Guru-Panth*. The nucleus of the Sikh Panth came into existence with Guru Nanak's followers worshipping in congregation and maintaining a community kitchen (*langar*). The number of congregations (*sangat*) with places (*dharmsala*) for worship and community meal multiplied during the sixteenth century. One contemporary reference to a *sangat* at worship in a *dharmsala* on *ekadasi* festival (*mela*) underlines the centrality of congregational singing (*kirtan*). The seasonal gatherings were generally larger than the monthly gatherings, particularly at the time of Baisakhi and Diwali.

The places like Goindwal and Ramdaspur, where the Gurus resided, became centres of Sikh pilgrimage. Guru Ramdas specifically refers to the great merit of bathing in the "pool of nectar" (*amritsar*) at Ramdaspur. The elevation of Amritsar to the first rank of the Sikh centres of pilgrimage during the eighteenth century had its justification in the foundation of the town deliberately as a centre of pilgrimage. Coming to these centres, the Sikhs felt conscious of their larger fraternity. This consciousness was reinforced by the adoption of distinctively Sikh ceremonies for birth, marriage and death. Bhai Gurdas, a contemporary of Guru Arjan and Guru Hargobind, gives emphatic expression to the distinctive character of the Sikh Panth. Even at the popular level of the *janam-sakhis* there is a consciousness of distinction. In one version, Guru Nanak is told by God that his Panth will flourish, his followers will be called Nanak-Panthis and their distinctive salutation will be "in the name of the true Guru I fall at your feet." Indeed, as the Vaishnavas have their temples, the yogis their *asans*, and the Muslims their mosques, "so your followers shall have their *dharmsala*."

The individual Sikh and the *sangat* were both given an increasing importance by the Gurus during the sixteenth century. Guru Amardas says that a devotee of God is like God Himself (*Har ki murit*). The congregation of the Sikhs (*sangat*) is the only true congregation. In the *bani* of Guru Ramdas, the devotees of God (*Har log*) are the best people (*uttam*); the true Guru is among

the Sikhs; and the *sangat* is dear to God. In an early *janam-sakhi* also, there is the statement that "the Guru is present in the congregation." It was generally believed that the prayers offered by a Sikh congregation found a sure response from God. Bhai Gurdas, in whose *Vars* many of the pre-Khalsa ideas crystallise, talks of the interchangeable position of the Guru and the Sikh, of the presence of the Guru in the *sangat* and in fact of the presence of God in the *sangat*. Thus well before the death of Guru Gobind Singh, in the literature of the seventeenth century we can perceive indications of a developing doctrine of the *Guru-Panth* which affirmed that "in the absence of the personal Guru, the local *sangat*, or congregation, within any area possesses the mystical power to make decisions on his behalf."

When Guru Gobind Singh decided not to nominate any single person as his successor, he could logically think of the entire body of the Khalsa as his successor. Senapat, a contemporary of Guru Gobind Singh, refers to the Khalsa as the visible form of the Guru. In the eighteenth century, we find the second Bhai Gurdas singing praises of Guru Gobind Singh with the refrain that he was at once the Guru and the disciple (*gur-chela*). The "codes" of Khalsa belief and conduct emphasised the injunction to consider the Khalsa as the Guru, "as the very embodiment of the Guru." The doctrine of *Guru-Panth* was based on an uncompromising equality of all members, and it implied democratic functioning. During the eighteenth century, this doctrine played a vital role in the affairs of the Sikh Panth. It did not contradict the idea of *Guru-Granth*. In fact these ideas appeared to be mutually complementary, and in combination they remained relevant as much for the social and political life of the Sikhs as for their religious life.

In the twentieth century the idea of *Guru-Panth* has been partially resuscitated. The demand for the management of the gurdwaras by the representatives of the Sikh Panth was in the last resort logically based on the assumption that the Sikh Panth collectively had the right to manage their religious affairs. The constitutional recognition of the collective entity of the Sikh Panth in the Gurdwara Act, which provided for the constitution of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, can be seen as both a culmination and a containment of the doctrine of *Guru-Panth*. It is interesting to note that the S.G.P.C was a more democratic institution in the 1920's than the state that gave it legal recognition.

Since Independence, the Akali Party has participated in the democratic processes of the country like other political parties. Its membership is open to non-Sikhs, but its President generally refers to himself as *Guru panth ka das*, a phrase suggestive at once of both the Panth of the Guru and the Panth as the Guru. Not all the Sikhs belong to the Akali Party; and among those who do not, many tend to think of themselves as secular in public life, either ignoring the past legacy or interpreting it in secular terms. The role assumed by the "cherished five" (*panj piare*) in different situations and meetings of the entire body of the Sikhs (*sarbat khalsa*) for different purposes suggests, however, that

for certain sections of the Sikh community the doctrine of *Guru-Panth* has not exhausted its appeal.

III

By the time of Guru Arjan's martyrdom in 1606, the Sikh Panth had become a state within the Mughal empire. The far-flung local congregations, their link with the Guru through the *masands*, and the financial autonomy of the whole organization were important features of the Panth. Equally important was the local autonomy of Ramdasapur, which was not merely a place of pilgrimage but also a self-governing town without any financial or administrative link with the Mughal empire. The common allegiance of the Sikhs to the Guru was even more important. Furthermore, the Sikh Panth had its opponents and enemies among those who reacted negatively to the socially radical teachings of the Gurus and among the rival claimants to their position. Their disputes in fact brought in the administrators, and the Sikh Panth was already an irritant for the Mughal emperor Jahangir before he ordered the execution of Guru Arjan for his alleged blessings to the rebel prince Khusrau.

During the century following the death of Guru Arjan, the Sikh Panth underwent a considerable degree of transformation, due largely to external interference in the affairs of the Gurus and their followers. Bhai Gurdas refers to the martial response of Guru Hargobind to the martyrdom of his predecessor as hedging the orchard of the Sikh faith with the hardy and thorny *kikar* tree. As a spokesman of the devoted Sikhs, Bhai Gurdas approves of the new measures, which included the construction of a fort in Ramdasapur and of the Akal Takht facing the Harmandir. The anti-establishment stance of Guru Hargobind was kept up by his successors. Virtually forced to choose between their allegiance to the Guru and their allegiance to the Mughal state, some of the Sikhs chose to follow the dissidents like Prithi Chand, Dhir Mal and Ram Rai, who were all patronized by the state. External interference thus introduced a strong element of disunity in the Sikh Panth.

The institution of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699 was meant to solve the problem of both external interference and internal disunity. To extend the metaphor of Bhai Gurdas, the Khalsa was at once the orchard and the hedge. Paradoxically, the institution of the Khalsa invited the external interference it was meant to obviate, and the implicit conflict between the Sikh Panth and the Mughal state was transformed into an open political struggle. At the time of Guru Gobind Singh's death in 1708, the issue was still unresolved, but Sikh rule was established in a large part of the Punjab within a few years by Banda Bahadur whom Guru Gobind Singh had commissioned to lead the Khalsa. This success was short-lived, but it left behind a legacy of sovereign rule outside the framework of the Mughal empire. "The Khalsa shall rule" (*raj karega khalsa*) became henceforth the aspiration of the followers of Guru Gobind Singh. In the seals used by Banda Bahadur, the victory was attributed to the grace of the Gurus. Thus, the political ambition of the Khalsa was sanctified.

The doctrine of *Guru-Panth* provided the principle of cohesion for their political struggle. It took a tangible form at three levels. For a limited purpose, only five members of the Khalsa (*panj piare*) could act on behalf of a congregation. For a larger but immediate purpose, all the Singhs present could resolve issues. As military and political issues began to command increasing attention, the doctrine of *Guru-Panth* began to cover the meetings of the entire body of the Singhs (*sarbat khalsa*) for decisions on issues of common interest. In all such meetings, the resolutions adopted (*gurmata*s) were in theory the decisions of the Guru deemed to be present in the Khalsa. Consequently, these resolutions were morally binding even on those who might be absent but who subscribed to the doctrine. The combination of the Khalsa hordes (*dal khalsa*) for a concerted action was a direct result of the common resolutions. Whereas the combination called *misl* was based on personal, kinship or local ties, the action of the Dal Khalsa was invariably based on a *gurmata*. ★

The doctrine of *Guru-Panth* served as the basis of consensus in several ways. The equality of the individual member built into the doctrine gave him the right to fight and conquer. Even if a single horseman occupied a village upon conquest, his right was recognized by others. This accounts for the emergence of a large number of Sikh "rulers" in the late eighteenth century. This recognition also implied the right of passage through the territories of other "rulers," made necessary by the occupation of small pockets of territory not always contiguous. Once the conquest was made, consensus was extended to the maintenance of the *status quo*. The "anarchy" associated with the *misl* period ignores the fact that by far the largest majority of the Sikh principalities and small *pattidaris* (shareholders in conquered territory) survived into the nineteenth century. The consensus was reflected also in the use of a common coin in the majority of the Sikh principalities.

The democratic consensus in certain areas of operation did not negate the rights of the individual in others. Every Sikh chief was free to enter into political relations with others. That was how a number of Sikh chiefs in the late eighteenth century established their suzerain claims over non-Sikh rulers. The autonomy of the individual Sikh ruler is more conspicuous in the exercise of power in relation to his government and administration. Significantly the term *khalsaji* came to be used for an individual too. Exercising autonomous power, nearly all the Sikh chiefs associated non-Sikhs with their government and administration from the very beginning of Sikh rule. That is how we come upon a considerable number of Hindu and Muslim *diwans*, *kardars* and *thanadars* in the territories of the Sikh chiefs during the late eighteenth century. Many of the Sikh chiefs kept up the *qazi's* court, which for certain purposes was open to Muslims and non-Muslims alike. A certain degree of liberalization in polity and administration was clearly in evidence in the territories of the late eighteenth-century Sikh chiefs.

The process of unification and expansion under Maharaja Ranjit Singh during the early nineteenth century was made possible partly by the late

eighteenth-century background, in which co-operation between the members of different religious communities in secular matters was an important feature. The ruling class under Maharaja Ranjit Singh did not belong to any particular caste or community. Not all its members in fact belonged to the Punjab. The state patronage throughout the period of Sikh rule was extended to Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims. The Punjabis came to have the largest share in the political power of the state and consequently in the economic advantages of that power. Significantly, in the Punjabi literature of the period, there is a clear note of regional articulation. The Sikh *raj* was obviously of the Sikhs at the top, but it was administered neither by nor for the Sikhs alone. It is equally important to underline, however, that the largest measure of power and patronage was enjoyed by Sikhs.

"*Raj karega khalsa*" has remained a part of the prayer-anthem of the Sikhs to the present day even when Sikh rule in itself has not carried much significance. During colonial rule, individual Sikhs increasingly associated themselves with revolutionary and left-socialist movements. The largest number among the Sikhs supported the anti-British Gurdwara Reform movement and the national movement for freedom. Only in 1946 for a short time the proposal of a separate Sikh state was made by a few Sikh leaders in the context of the general proposition for the creation of two sovereign states in the Indian subcontinent. Like the rest of their countrymen, the Sikhs started participating in the democratic processes gradually introduced under British rule. The participation of Sikhs in the democratic processes of the Indian republic under the banner of different political parties on secular bases has reinforced the idea of sharing power in a constitutional democracy. The Akali Dal is the only political party with an overwhelming majority of Sikh members. Like some other political parties in the country, the Akali Dal supports the idea of greater autonomy for the states, but in their case the demand is looked upon by their opponents as a sort of prelude for *raj karega khalsa*. The really important aspect of the demand is its constitutional character. Recently, however, a few Sikhs have given expression to the idea of sovereign rule. This may be taken as symptomatic of dissatisfaction with the existing order of things, whether due to genuine frustration over deprivation of economic opportunities, or perceived discrimination against the Punjab state, or the rising aspirations of a privileged section of the Sikhs, or their ouster into the political wilderness, or all of these put together.

IV

The British administrators of the Punjab in the early 1850's gathered the impression that "Sikhism" was on the decline. This is stated by Denzil Ibbetson in the census report of 1881. In the first census, in 1855, there had in fact been no separate enumeration of Sikhs. Even in 1881, only those Sikhs were counted who were non-smoking *keshdharis*; in other words, only the Khalsa or the Singhs, and not all the Sikhs, were enumerated. Therefore, the number of Sikhs

enumerated for the first time in 1868 at less than 12 *lakhs* (1,200,000) is misleading. However, the composition of the Sikh community could not have changed radically within a few decades, and the figures for 1881 and 1921 surely indicate that it was changing only gradually.

The figures of 1881 and 1921 clearly demonstrate that the bulk of the Sikh community, over 70%, consisted of agriculturists, and of these nearly 90% were Jats. About 8% of the Sikhs consisted of "outcastes" like the Chamars and the Churahs. Among the artisans and craftsmen there was a preponderance of carpenters (Tarkhans), who represented more than 7% of the community. The Aroras and Khatri together formed less than 7%. More than twenty-five castes were represented in the Sikh community, including the highest as well as the lowest of the low. It is interesting to note that Brahmans, Rajputs, Khatri, Jats, artisans, service-performing individuals and outcastes had found representation in the Sikh Panth already in the sixteenth century. What is important to know, however, is not merely the representation of certain castes in the Sikh Panth but also the proportion of the members representing a particular social background.

It is not possible to form a precise idea of the proportion of different sections of the population accepting the Sikh faith during the sixteenth century, but the general impression we get from contemporary and near-contemporary evidence on the point suggests that the trading castes, particularly the Khatri, formed the dominant part of the Sikh Panth in terms of leadership, if not also in numbers. From the evidence of Bhai Gurdas, writing in the early seventeenth century, it appears that the Khatri formed the most important constituency of the Sikh community. Over a score of well-known Khatri subcastes are mentioned in connection with the eminent followers of the Gurus. However, there were prominent Sikhs belonging to other castes and subcastes. There were some Randhawa, Khaira, Dhillon and Pannu Jats. Among the Brahmans, there were Tiwari and Bhardwaj. There were Suds and Aroras. Then there were Lohars, Nais, Chamars, Mistris, Sunars, Machhis, Dhobis, Kumhars, Telis, and even Chandals. [In terms not only of social background but also of the economic means of its members, the Sikh Panth of the early seventeenth century was far from being homogeneous.]

In the early eighteenth century, members with rural background appear to have dominated the Sikh Panth in terms of leadership and perhaps also numbers. Even in the early seventeenth century, Jat *masands* were noticed by the author of the *Dabistan-i-mazahib*. The institution of the Khalsa first, and then the political struggle with the Mughal state under the leadership of Banda Bahadur, brought in people from the countryside on a large scale. This development was accentuated during the long political struggle of the Khalsa, when the cities and towns were not safe for the activists and there was no permanent base. Dominant among the Khalsa who established their rule in the Punjab during the 1760's were Jats. However, there were a few non-Jat chiefs also, like Jassa Singh Ahluwalia (a Kalal) and Jassa Singh Ramgarhia (a carpenter). They too had risen from the countryside. Among those who were associated with the Sikh

government and administration were not only Jats but also Khattris, Jhiwars, Nais and Ranghretas. A considerable number of people joined the Sikh fold after the establishment of Sikh rule. This process continued during the early nineteenth century. Cunningham's estimate of about 1.5 million Sikhs in the entire Punjab in the 1840's was not far off the mark. The political and numerical dominance of Jat Sikhs was beyond any doubt, but the composition of the Sikh community was marked by much diversity.

The Sikh social order was meant to be an egalitarian order and not a caste order. Guru Nanak perceived the light of God in all men: "Do not ask a man's caste, for in the hereafter there is no caste." "Worthless is caste and worthless an exalted name; for all mankind there is but a single refuge." These, and some other utterances of Guru Nanak and his successors, indicate that the distinctions of caste were disregarded. The idea of ritual purity and ritual status was discarded with scorn. The idea of equality was given a tangible shape in congregational worship and the community meal, the central features of Sikh *dharmsalas*. Bhai Gurdas insists that the social background of the Sikhs did not matter. Guru Nanak addressed himself to all the four *varnas* and persons coming from all the *varnas* accepted his path. Just as the betel leaf, *arica*-nut and lime produced one colour, the individuals coming from different backgrounds acquired a common colour when they joined the Sikh Panth. All the four *varnas* become one and acquire the *gotra* of *gurmukh*. The guru transmutes eight metals into one.

However, the increasing number of Sikhs and the diversity of their social background did present a problem. The occupation of a person did not change upon his joining the Sikh Panth, and his economic means did not necessarily change. There was no injunction against following the old patterns of matrimonial relations, and no need was felt to change them. Therefore, a horizontal link continued among the Sikhs coming from particular caste and occupation groups. As socially committed householders, the Sikhs were expected to earn an honest living and not live on doles; they contributed to the common pool in cash and kind. If the new ethos improved their economic condition, it was regarded as the grace of the Guru and the grace of God. In the *bani* of Guru Ramdas, for instance, the wealth and riches of the Sikh are sanctified. Indeed, of those who earn merit by following the path shown by the true Guru, their houses, their mansions and caparisoned horses are sanctified. Thus, in the single *varna* to which the Sikhs of Bhai Gurdas theoretically belonged, there were rich magnates as well as paupers, and the difference between them appeared to be part of the Divine Order.

The ideal equality was reasserted with the institution of the Khalsa. In fact, the idea was extended to the realm of politics. Paradoxically, the equal right to fight and conquer, which led to acquisition of power, also led to acquisition of material means and therefore to social differentiation. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries social differentiation among the Sikhs went on increasing, due to the operation of government and administration. If the

difference had ranged from a bondservant to a rich magnate during the early seventeenth century, in the early nineteenth century it ranged from a day labourer to a king. The gradations in between also became more numerous. Among the Jats, for example, there was all the difference between a member of the ruling class and a peasant, while there were other grades of Jats in between. Similarly, one Jhiwar could be a *jagirdar* commanding a hundred horsemen and enjoying revenues worth a hundred thousand rupees, while another was still performing the customary service in a village under the *jajmani* system. Caste solidarities and caste distinctions were weakened or broken in some ways, while social differentiation based upon the difference of economic means and social prestige was increasing. It should not come to us as a surprise that the doctrine of *Guru-Panth* now lost much ground and the doctrine of *Guru-Granth* came to the fore. The latter reconciled the ideal norm of equality to the existing social and economic inequalities in the Sikh social order. The Sikh monarchy extended its political umbrella over all, and yet the dream of *raj karega khalsa* appeared to have come true.

Under colonial rule the ideal of equality was revived with partial success by social reformers among the Sikhs, particularly in its bearing on socio-religious matters. Economic egalitarianism was not a part of the egalitarian legacy of the Sikh past, and no conscious thought has been directed towards the lessening of economic inequalities within the Sikh social order. In fact, the ideas of secular democracy and socialism appear to have overtaken the limited egalitarianism coming down from the Sikh past. If socio-economic inequalities are increasing or decreasing within the Sikh community due to state policies, the process is looked upon with indifference. Possibly, the gain of the few is equated with the gain of the community.

V

J.D. Cunningham noticed nearly a score of "Sikh sects or denominations" during the early 1840's. Some of these, however, were merely certain privileged groups like the Bedi descendants of Lakhmidas, the younger son of Guru Nanak, and the Trehan, Bhalla and Sodhi descendants of Guru Angad, Guru Amardas and Guru Ramdas. They all enjoyed generous patronage from the Sikh rulers, and their wealth added to the prestige of their descent. Cunningham's list included also Bhais and Gianis, Akalis and Nihangs, Ranghretas and Ramdasias, Banda Panthis and Masandis. Though interesting in the social configuration of the Sikh community, they did not constitute sects or religious denominations. However, Cunningham also refers to Udasis and Ramraiya, who could certainly be regarded as belonging to different denominations. In any case, the question of ideological differentiation within the Sikh community, raised by Cunningham, remains important.

Dissent in early Sikhism can be understood with reference to the principle of nomination, on which was based the cardinal doctrine of the unity and continuity of guruship. Guru Angad, who used the epithet Nanak in his

compositions, declared that the gift of guruship could be received only from the master and not by nominating oneself. Similarly, Guru Amardas appears to underline the principle of nomination when he states that there is no guru but the True Guru, or that there is only one True Bani and only one True Guru. In these utterances we can feel the presence of "other gurus." For Bhai Gurdas, succession through nomination was no ordinary succession. When Angad became the Guru, Nanak became his Sikh; the Guru became the Sikh and Sikh became the Guru. The Guru-disciple-Guru syndrome raised the principle of nomination into a doctrine at a time when dissent was becoming rather obtrusive.

Guru Angad's insistence on the principle of nomination was directed against Sri Chand, the elder son of Guru Nanak, who claimed to be a successor of Guru Nanak. Supported by custom and the state law, the sons of Guru Angad in turn claimed his establishment at Khadur, and the nominated Guru, Amardas, had to move to Goindwal. Before he nominated his son-in-law, Ramdas, as the successor-Guru, Guru Amardas started building a new centre for him, and the sons of Guru Amardas succeeded to his headquarters at Goindwal. Guru Arjan was the first nominated Guru who did not leave the headquarters of his predecessor. However, his elder brother Prithi Chand did not hesitate to seek help from the state functionaries in support of his own claims. Bhai Gurdas's denunciation of his followers, the "dissembling scoundrels" (*mina*), becomes loud and harsh.

Prithi Chand's son Mihrban occupied Ramdaspur after Guru Hargobind's departure from the town around 1630. Mihrban wrote his own compositions using the epithet Nanak of himself, with the implication that he was in the true line of succession from Guru Nanak. He wrote a *janam-sakhi* also to reinforce his claims. His son, Harji, succeeded him at Ramdaspur as the seventh successor of Guru Nanak. Thus, the "dissembling scoundrels" became rather formidable rivals of the successors of Guru Hargobind at Kiratpur. By the early eighteenth century, however, the *minas* were ousted from Ramdaspur. Under Sikh rule, the descendants of Harji received revenue-free lands at Guru Har Sahai in the present Ferozepur district. The descendants of his two brothers also received revenue-free lands in Batala and near Sarhind. By this time, the dissent of the *minas* had become a thing of the past.

Guru Hargobind's elder grandson, Dhir Mal, established his centre at Kartarpur in the Jullundur Doab, not recognising the nomination of his younger brother, Har Rai. Dhir Mal, too, had a considerable following. His fourth successor, Sadhu Singh, approached Jassa Singh Ahluwalia to intercede with the Khalsa for admitting him to their fold. Sadhu Singh henceforth received large *jagirs* from the Sikh rulers, and remained in a rather low key as a "Guru." The descendants of Suraj Mal, son of Guru Hargobind, were enjoying large *jagirs* in the early nineteenth century, holding in fact the Anandpur-Makhowal area virtually as minor chiefs. They were also laying their claims to guruship. Guru Har Rai's son, Ram Rai, did not recognise the nomination of his younger brother

Guru Har Krishan. He was patronised by Aurangzeb and received a considerable *jagir* at the present Dehra Dun. His centre was taken over by Udasis after his death in the early eighteenth century.

The Udasis set aside the principle of nomination by adopting parallel lines of succession from Guru Nanak through Sri Chand, Baba Gurditta and the four Ad-Udasis. They were patronised by the Mughal administrators in the early eighteenth and by the Sikh rulers in the late eighteenth century. They were more lavishly patronised by Ranjit Singh in the early nineteenth century, and they established a large number of centres in the countryside as well as in towns and cities. The rejection of the principle of nomination in their case was accompanied by some other differences of belief and practice.

✱ From the viewpoint of ideological differentiation an important change was introduced by the institution of the Khalsa. Initiation through the baptism of the double-edged sword and the wearing of *kes* and turban made the Singhs quite distinct from the earlier Sikhs. Furthermore, since only those of the Sikhs who became the Khalsa of Guru Gobind Singh were to be regarded as Sikhs, the Singhs were forbidden to have any kind of relation with the *minas* and the followers of Dhir Mal, Ram Rai and the *masands*. Henceforth dissent became easily identifiable and the dissenters stood excommunicated from the Khalsa Panth.

However, not all the Sikhs of the time of Guru Gobind Singh became his Khalsa. The non-Khalsa Sikhs survived into the eighteenth century, and their number, like that of the Khalsa, appears to have increased subsequently. Nevertheless, a basic difference was introduced by the Khalsa. The primary division now was between the *kesdhari* Singhs and the *sahajdhari* Sikhs. Even the latter status was accorded to only those Sikhs who were sympathisers of the Khalsa, or who at least were not openly opposed to them. Through this compromise, ideological differentiation was legitimized, and even the old dissidents were recognized as a part of the Sikh Panth. The minimum that was expected from the *sahajdhari* Sikhs was a belief in the guruship of Nanak and the acceptance of the scriptural authority of the Holy Granth; they were also expected to refrain from smoking.

In the early nineteenth century, there were further differences of belief and practice among the *sahajdhari* Sikhs. The Udasis were renunciants and their reverence for Guru Nanak was rather notional; their interpretation of the Holy Granth was clearly Vedantic. Their religious practices were not uniform but in all their establishments some Hindu practices were observed. At the other end, the Nirankaris in the 1840's had a deep respect for all the ten Gurus, recognized the exclusive authority of the Holy Granth for religious belief and practice, rejected all gods and goddesses except the Formless One (*Nirankar*), and adopted Sikh ceremonies for birth, marriage and death in accordance with their understanding of the Holy Granth.

Among the *kesdhari* Singhs, there were a small number of Akalis and Nihangs. They had survived the period of intense political struggle but without

any territories or administrative positions. They had their own establishments (*deras*) and they were associated with some of the important gurdwaras. They upheld the primacy of the doctrine of *Guru-Panth* and paid equal veneration to the Dasam Granth as the sacred scripture. They prided themselves on observing the Khalsa code of conduct, which in their belief was enunciated by Guru Gobind Singh himself. The ordinary Singh also observed some items of the Khalsa code of conduct, besides wearing *kesh* and turban and refraining from smoking. Because of the increasing number of the Singhs during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a need was felt for propagating the Khalsa code of conduct, and several *rahit-namas* became current during the period. Cunningham's extracts from two of such *rahit-namas* clearly indicate, among other things, that the doctrines of *Guru-Panth* and *Guru-Granth* and the idea of Sikh sovereignty were well established by this time.

The policy of Maharaja Ranjit Singh was to tolerate ideological differentiation. The Golden Temple and the Akal Takht, which had become the most important institutions for the Khalsa during the eighteenth century, were imperceptibly taken over by the Maharaja on behalf of the Singhs. The transition was rather smooth because Jassa Singh Ahluwalia had been managing the affairs of the Golden Temple by common consent. Maharaja Ranjit Singh entrusted the management of the Golden Temple to one of his *jagirdars*. He placated the Akalis and the Nihangs by enlisting them in the army or by giving them revenue-free lands. Individual Akalis, like Phula Singh, were allowed to proclaim that the authority of the collective body of the Khalsa was supreme in the Panth, but none was allowed to interfere in the affairs of the state. In fact, much greater patronage was extended to the most "unorthodox" of the Sikhs, that is, the Udasis, than to the most "orthodox" of the Khalsa, that is, the Akalis and the Nihangs. All Singhs believed in the end of personal guruship after death of Guru Gobind Singh and in the unity of guruship. This belief combined with the wearing of *kesh* and turban and refraining from smoking provided the common ground for the bulk of the Singhs during the early nineteenth century.

The Singh component of the Sikh community increased appreciably under colonial rule. Nevertheless, the *sahajdhari* component still forms an integral part of the community. The secularisation of life and thought which has taken place in the world during the recent centuries has influenced the members of the Sikh community as well. However, there is also a reaction. Secularisation involving indifference to religious belief and practice is regarded by many as a serious threat to the cherished legacies of the past. This is true not only of the Sikhs but also of other religious communities in the country. That may be the major reason why no effort has been made to translate the legacy of religious ideologies into secular goals. At any rate, religiosity and secularisation have developed side by side. What is referred to as fundamentalism, whether Sikh or Hindu or Muslim, has to be placed in this broad context.